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**MOVING
TOWARDS EAST**
GLOBAL JOURNEYS TO HOME
IN POSTCOLONIAL FICTION



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Introduction

The postcolonial world we live in

In 1988, in her foundational essay *Can the subaltern speak?*, Gayatri Spivak called into question the problem of the western construction of the “Other“, wondering if postcolonial subjects had the possibility to express themselves escaping from the logic of colonialism. Her conclusion was not optimistic since she affirmed that «the subaltern cannot speak» (Spivak 1994: 105), at least without the mediation of the European colonial gaze. In fact, the racial and mental stereotypes imposed by the English mother–country have allowed to build an image of England as a perfect socio–political place (Blake, Gandhi, Thomas 2001: 2), at the expense of its colonies which started to look at it as a model and an ideal of “home”, thus contributing to shaping stereotypes about the superiority of the English nation. This situation and the hope for a better future pushed many colonized people to migrate to the former mother–country at the end of World War II. This was the beginning of the era of the great migrations, signed by the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, as well as by the myth of Great Britain as welcoming host land.

Thus, migration is the condition under which former colonized people have lived since the 1950s, and literature is the tool through which they have narrated their experiences. By leaving their homelands and families in order to move to the UK and start a new life in their British mother–country, many South Asian, African, and Caribbean people have struggled to come to terms with several complications, such as the plague of racism or deracination, and the conflict between their cultural traditions and the customs of their new country. Nonetheless, postcolonial authors ultimately managed to give voice to their dreams and

experiences, also by depicting their communities in the UK and recalling Benedict Anderson's idea of *Imagined Communities* (1994). Anderson's notion was based on the fundamental importance given to novels and newspapers as the two basic forms to represent modern national communities since the XVIII century (Anderson 2000: 25). Therefore, the imagined community is wherever a literary construct manages to take root, as the *Caribbean Voices* of Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and many others did in the 1950s, speaking in the famous radiophonic program which signed the beginning of their career (Looker 1996: 8).

However, British reaction to this big flow of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and West Indies has been quite violent and discriminating. Fights, riots, and mobs against migrants were the norm especially in the 1970s and 1980s. The government as well approved a series of acts designated to dishearten immigration and to homogenize migrants under the "black" label, a category which had the function to represent non-white people as outsiders, that is illegitimate and alien to the nation. In this light, black people were seen as an invading force which threatened the British way of life, while the concept of race became a mutable social construction (Dawson 2007: 19). As a result, the word "black" started to be considered as a homogenizing or umbrella term which depicts any non-white person, without taking into consideration the disparate nationalities and roots of different generations of migrants, or the ambivalent position of migrants' children who were born in the UK.

Stuart Hall has been one of the first scholars who theorized the necessity of the black community to be represented in a different way, especially through a shift of its own cultural and literary production in order to challenge also a monolithic representation of national identity. In his ground-breaking essay *New Ethnicities* (1988), he underlines the «end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject» (Hall 1995: 202), claiming for the recognition of "black" as a politically and culturally constructed category, and questioning the hegemony of the white ideological constructs. From this moment, the tension between

black and white started to be a political issue and had significant consequences at the level of the literary and linguistic representation of Blackness because it contested the image of the black subject «as a mouthpiece, a ventriloquist for an entire social category which is seen to be “typified” by its representative. [...] Where minority subjects are framed and contained by the monologic terms of ‘majority discourse’, the fixity of boundary relations between centre and margin, universal and particular, returns the speaking subject to the ideologically appointed place of the stereotype — that “all black people are the same”» (Procter 2000: 279–280).

This volume intends to follow in this perspective, by rejecting the fixity which characterized the racial debate in the past and highlighting the peculiarities of different multifaceted communities of migrant people who have been living in England from the 1950s to nowadays. By acknowledging that the migrant condition is the common denominator which has distinguished the Black British experience since the 1950s, my purpose is to reread the position of subaltern people through the voices of different generations of diasporic communities, investigating their narrative representations of personal or fictional experiences of migration, migrants’ feelings, and emotions. My approach to this highly debated topic will be mediated by the investigation of a particular kind of migration, that is return migration. Migrants’ dream of homecoming will be therefore the focus through which I will examine their communities and their links to space and concepts of home and homeland in a contemporary migrant global context.

Furthermore, a cross-national comparison will make evident that cultural elements are insufficient to explain the social and global aspects which stand at the basis of the examined literary works. In order to expand the spectrum of analysis and to exploit a transnational and global perspective, I will consider also some examples of South Asian migration to the USA. This allows to incorporate the literary examination into a theoretical framework which includes also global and sociological migration studies. This kind of approach permits to examine how postcolonial

authors from the former colonies have portrayed the West, with a focus on the current diaspora and migrant phenomena and on the effects of globalization on the literary and personal journeys of diasporic writers. In this light, I suggest a line of investigation which examines both the notion of return migration and, at the same time, highlights a recent tendency towards what I perceive as an authentic western reverse migration to East. What I would like to demonstrate is how the global challenges of the XXI century are affecting the balances between western and eastern world, moving our conventional perception of “centre” towards the former colonies. So, considering that literature is one of the most powerful tools that people can use in order to interpret and understand social changes, I will investigate some significant postcolonial works, as well as three English authors’ novels, in order to demonstrate and explain such changes through a comparative perspective.

Moreover, the evolution of postcolonial studies in the last thirty years and the development of a transnational approach in literary studies (Jay 2010) have led to a different way of seeing and studying subaltern voices, that is a global approach, especially related to the phenomena of migration and diaspora as they have been depicted by postcolonial authors from the South Asian area. In one of her essays, Spivak affirmed that «Today the “subaltern” must be rethought» (Spivak 2000: 326); so, in this light, I will cope with a precise theoretical framework which collocates my project at the crossroads of different discursive formations, such as Global studies, Migration and Diaspora studies, and Postcolonial and Black British literature. Through the analysis of the selected novels, I will show how the concept of World literature has been reinvigorated by the connection between literature and globalization and «how literary tradition should be described and institutionally engaged, gradually moving away from conventional organization along national or regional lines towards a more joined-up international or global view» (Gupta 2009: 136–137). This shift from a national perspective towards a transnational viewpoint has been fundamental also for the formation of an updated postcolonial

theory which helps literature to traverse all kinds of boundaries (145).

The study of literature in global terms calls into question Global studies (Damrosch 2003: 25), whose transnational and interdisciplinary nature makes them the perfect subtext for this work. This is because, although many aspects of contemporary globalization are based on European colonial precedents, most Global studies scholars do not accept uncritically the western privileged patterns of economic, political, and cultural globalization. Some scholars even avoid using the term globalization to describe their field of study, as it is sometimes used to imply the promotion of a Western-dominated hegemonic project. This rejection is proposed also by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his *Provincializing Europe* (2000), one of the first works which tried to explore how the political experience of the XXI century could be renewed and rethought from the margins of the periphery. In this context, literature plays a relevant role as a fundamental instrument of investigation of the contemporary world balances, especially considering the relations of power established after World War II between Occident and Orient — the so-called centre and periphery. Nowadays, India and other former European colonies are, in fact, rapidly improving their social, economic and politic systems. Even though Chakrabarty claims that «The project of provincializing “Europe” refers to a history that does not yet exist» (Chakrabarty 2000: 42), today it is possible to affirm that the time is ripe for this kind of theoretical proposal since the two “moves” required by Chakrabarty could be now achieved:

The project of provincializing Europe has to include certain additional moves: first, the recognition that Europe’s acquisition of the adjective “modern” for itself is an integral part of the story of European imperialism within global history; and second, the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with “modernity” is not the work of Europeans alone; third—world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process. (43)

These peculiar ways of thinking about Europe as the centre of the modern world is therefore not only the heritage of a colonial

and imperial past, but also the result of a passive and collaborative behaviour from the former colonies which took the European nation-states as role models. Nonetheless, in the last decades, the situation begun to change; some postcolonial nations, like India, are now playing an important role in this process. Therefore, the study of migration and diaspora from a literary perspective is a sort of natural re-reading of the social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of the current world system(s), which will lead to a new idea of home(s) with many variants, due to the loss of «permanent, stable, and sanctified homeplaces [...]». Nevertheless, «the possibility of *a* home, the ultimate peaceful retreat, a this-worldly alternative to social fragmentation and tumultuous travelling continues to resonate» (Markowitz-Anders, Stefansson 2004: 22), and this is evident not only for the generations of migrants who directly experienced diaspora (McLeod 2000) in the past decades, but also for many western people, because of the implications and consequences of globalization. Looking for home nowadays is therefore a primary need also for European citizens, and in this sense postcolonial literature can become a useful instrument of investigation since it manages to portray these quite hidden social phenomena.

The topic of return migration has not been particularly tackled in the literary context as it has been instead in sociological surveys, hence one of the aims of the book is to fill this gap. As a result, the theoretical background owes much to both sociological investigations on return migration and actual reports of some returnees' experience. One of the purposes is to trace, in the migrant literary works, the same trajectories towards the former colonies drawn by sociological reports, thus following a socio-literary methodology which exploits and intersects Postcolonial Studies, Global Studies, Migration Studies, and Black British literature.

First of all, I will refer to all the novels as postcolonial or post-postcolonial works, even if they have been written by white English authors, in order to follow Chakrabarty's project of provincializing the perspective from which we have always seen not only Europe and the UK, but also the USA, especially

considered the evolution of the concept of «spaces of representation» which are «part and parcel of the way we live in the world. We may also seek to represent the way this space is lived through emotions and the imagination. The spatiotemporality of a dream, a fantasy, a hidden longing, a lost memory or even a peculiar thrill as we walk down a street can be given representation through works of art» (Harvey 2006: 278). In fact, the so-called «spatial turn» in literary studies has emphasized a new way of perceiving the notions of space and place in the Humanities, especially in literature, asserting that «space is a social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena» (Warf, Arias 2009: 1). In this light, the purpose of provincializing the West intends to discuss the universal validity of its values and forms of representations, as well as the centrality of its literature, in order to consider if literary representations can transcend places of origin, or if places leave a such considerable impression on literature that they manage to call into question also these purely abstract categories. Chakrabarty returns to this theme by questioning about the role of history and pointing out that «[...] Europe, one could say, has been provincialized by history itself» (Chakrabarty 2000: xvii). The purpose is therefore to relativize the European and western thought and make it less central, trying to re-read also the postcolonial analytical and critical texts. Thus, the notions of “hybridity”, “mimicry”, and “in-between” or “liminal” zone theorized by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), as well as the *Imagined Communities* (1994) and the *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) suggested by Benedict Anderson and Salman Rushdie, can be traced in literature and reconsidered in relation to globalization’s theories and the studies on migration, with their sociological and cultural effects. Therefore, the examination of the novels will deal with some fundamental concepts shared by Postcolonial and Migration literature, such as home and homeland, identity and community, space and city, but with a post-postcolonial approach which would like to relativize also the post-colonial conceptualizations. One of the aims is to

examine how these traditional concepts can be applied to the current world and how they could be connected to the new shifts imposed by globalization, by linking the debates on the global cultural effects to Black British literature and to the migrant phenomena depicted by authors of the South Asian diaspora.

In this light, in order to clarify the terms, it is relevant to postulate that Black British literature is a quite confusing term which still offers some problem of classification. As Mark Stein points out,

For a variety of reasons, terms such as post-colonial literature or black British literature are often considered problematic. The heterogeneity of texts so labelled seems to defy the logic of these categories, which also applies to designations such as English literature or British literature. This raises the question whether a group of texts indeed has to be homogenous in order to be considered “a group of texts”—whether English, British, or black British. The question of categorization is always a political one, especially when we consider categories such as English Literature. The political implications of inclusion and exclusion remain. Grouping texts together as black texts, or as women’s writing, or as postcolonial or gay, are acts in history, because such interventions condition the significance and the meaning that texts attain in any given reading. (Stein 2004: xv)

So, giving a conclusive definition of what Black British literature means is not an easy matter, especially for the heterogeneity of authors and works that it includes. As for the black label, also Black British literature’s history is, in fact, characterized by a heterogeneous variety of events and protagonists. The first Black British literary scene comprised «writers who were principally concerned with the country they had left behind» (Etienne-Cummings 2007: 177), migrants who were not totally at home in England and whose aim was «to write the humanity of ‘Black’ colonised peoples against the dominant British narrative that immigrants from the colonies were a sort of living virus on the host nation» (177). Hence the second generation has re-conceptualised the term “Black” as an «essentialist, homogenizing term that gave no weight to the experiences of non-Black minority groups» (348), so that the

definition of Black British was then extended to include not only people with black skin moving in England after World War II, but also South Asian people who migrated all over the world, thus inaugurating the era of a definitive broadening of the term which now includes all non-white individuals with different experiences of migration.

Kwame Dawes uses a very impressive image in order to explicate the unequal position of Black British authors in western societies and in its collective consciousness: in 1815, the cartoonist John Thomas Smith illustrated the famous African London beggar Joseph Johnson — who came from the experience of deportation and slavery in the USA — with a large and strange hat on his head which was topped by the perfect reproduction of a complete ship. The hat was «an ironic apology to white British society for his [Joseph Johnson] presence as Black man in that country [...] an apology in the sense of an explanation, a rationale for his presence, his existence and his condition» (Dawes 2005: 255). According to Dawes, even Black British writers have to wear their hats on their heads, trying to describe and explain their in-between condition to white people through their novels and poems; and many of these writers actually went to Britain as migrants, as Joseph Johnson did at the beginning of the XIX century, carrying the weight of their extravagant hats. These migrants can be distinguished in a first generation of authors who consciously chose to move from their homelands; and a second generation which includes people who were born in the UK or USA and describe their lives and the troubles of growing up in a “foreign” country between the 1980s and the 2000s. I would personally add a third group of contemporary migrants who show and try to explain the new trajectories and flows of migration of the last fifteen years: English migrant displacements towards the South Asian former colonies, especially India. I will demonstrate that it is a growing phenomenon, that cannot be ignored. Moreover, in each of these groups of novels and authors, a peculiar emphasis will be given to the notion of return and reverse migration.

Generally speaking, the migrant desire of homecoming is ancestral and well represented by both the first and second generation of migrants; however, the developments and changes of the global economic situation now allow migrants to concretely return home, both permanently or temporarily (King 1986, Markowitz–Anders, Stefansson 2004, Conway Potter 2005 and 2009, Percival 2013). In particular, second-generationers manage to return, thanks to their higher education and stable career position, their new attitude towards transnational experience or because they are pushed by their parents' stories (Conway, Potter 2009: 5). On the other hand, people of the first generation mainly return home for a sense of nostalgia when they retire after years of work abroad (Conway, Potter, Phillips 2005: 5), even though the motives to migrate and then come back are numerous and can vary from a vast range of possibilities. While the dream of homecoming has always been present in migrants' minds—as the examined novels demonstrate with an actual fulfilment of this dream –, more recent literary works show also examples of white English people who move to the former colonies for different reasons, such as pleasure, retirement or work. The attempt to marginalize the European perspective is in fact well represented also in the English post-postcolonial literature of the last fifteen years, which depicts stories of British characters who are looking for a new home in India, in what I define as a sort of British reversal from West to East, or British “reverse” migration.

The volume firstly follows the migrants' routes depicted by Black British novelists in order to examine the consequences of global and transnational evolutions and events on migrants' identities, as well as their reactions in relation to their conditions in Britain. Thus, since «for different reasons, ranging from professional choice to political exile, writers from a medley of once-colonized nations have participated in the late twentieth-century condition of migrancy» (Boehmer 1995: 233), I will take into consideration the works of authors who personally experimented or simply depict the migrant journey with its complications and worries with a sole purpose in their heads: the

dream of homecoming. I will focus on the evolution of the traditional postcolonial notions of identity, hybridity, community, space, and city in order to discover how the literary and social image of Black British migrants and the idea of “home” have changed. Hence, starting from the standpoint which sees postcolonial literature in a less powerful and privileged position than the western (often English) “canon”, the analysis insists on the idea that relations of power among different countries and literary traditions are progressively changing, modifying the balances towards a transnational, multicultural, and cosmopolitan paradigm which privileges the interconnections between Migration studies, Global studies, and Postcolonial literature. Well aware that globalization and postcolonial works ought to be studied together and that the centre–periphery model has to be complicated in relation to back–and–forth flows of people (Jay 2010: 3), I will investigate the assumptions of theorists of globalization and literary scholars who have highlighted the connection between postcolonialism and the global economic, social and cultural phenomena of the last years (Appadurai 1996, Appiah 2006). These considerations will be the starting point for the ultimate investigation of the reverse migration’s novels.

The book is structured into four chapters and aims at highlighting the desire of homecoming and the ancestral relation to homeland of people who migrated to the UK or the USA, as well as the complexity of the idea of home for the second generation, and the recent tendency towards reverse migration of British people.

The first chapter is a preliminary section which introduces the theoretical background by analysing the different notions of migration and diaspora, community and citizenship, space and place, and home and homeland from the return and reverse migrants’ perspective. Indeed, these concepts will be examined in relation to the voices of diasporic writers and their ideas of home(s) described in contemporary Black British and South Asian literature in English by following a post–national standpoint, according to which diasporic and migrant people are

looking for new forms of identity and home through the return and reverse migration's processes.

The second section deals with first-generation migrants of South Asian origins. In particular, the focus is on experiences of returning home of these migrants, firstly considering their idea of community and their identity developments in the UK and the USA. So, both the celebration and the disillusionment of the migrant experience will be discussed in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Shoba Narayan's *Return to India: an immigrant memoir* (2012), and Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World* (2000). This chapter particularly deals with how notions of migrant identity and community and homecoming have been approached in 1980s, a period wherein it is not uncommon to glimpse the first signs of a mutable system. The chapter also faces questions of a new global spatiality and its linkage to the return, especially to India, of the protagonists of the novels.

The third chapter goes in depth into the clash between first and second generation by examining the latter's feelings and anxieties. This section focuses on the back-journeys in 1990s and early 2000s of Indian and Pakistani migrants' children who, however, see their ancestral homeland as a distant place. The bond with their parents' birthplace is, therefore, quite remote and, in some cases, inhabits just their deepest unconscious. This is the case of Tariq Mehmood's *While there is Light* (2003) and Arinta Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* (1999), but also of Hardeep Kholi's *Indian Takeaway* (2008). Each of these novels deals with the second-generation complications of people who are both actual British citizens and still discriminated migrants.

The last section investigates the phenomenon of reverse migration. White British people migrating to India are the protagonists of Deborah Moggach's *These Foolish Things* (2004), Geoff Dyer's *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* (2009), and *Becoming Mrs Kumar* (2013) by Heather Saville Gupta. This group of texts denotes that postcolonial literature has recently widened its boundaries to embrace also the motivations of English people who have decided to move to the former colonies, in what can be defined as a veritable post-postcolonial context.

Hence a new scenario of investigation of the current migration flows is offered by the narration of three possible cases of reverse journey: Moggach's *These Foolish Things* is an example of migration after retirement, *Jeff in Venice*, *Death in Varanasi* depicts the experience of a British journalist enchanted by the intense and vivid atmosphere of the Indian ambivalent city of Varanasi, while Gupta's *Becoming Mrs Kumar* deals with a classical instance of working migration, but in reverse, from London to Mumbai. These three works are central points of discussion for my thesis, since they have been written by three English authors, thus emphasising the impact of the recent global phenomena also on the field of English literature, thus leading to an enlargement of the traditional notion of postcolonial English literature towards a post–postcolonial literature.

As a result, although international migration from the Rest to the West still proliferates, it is not possible to deny the reversed diasporic path. The argumentation will be focused also on the fundamental role of the concept of home, even in the current condition of post–national and trans–national migration. Indeed, the centrality and the adamant presence of the bond with both home(s) and homeland(s) will be eventually emphasized. Each of the keywords which will be introduced and discussed in the first chapter collaborates in the formation of the diasporic identities which are the protagonists of the analysed novels. The theoretical framework will help to clarify the literary/sociological line of investigation, in order to emphasise the common desire of homecoming which characterises all migrants' identities.

